

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 STR-07 DOE-15 SOE-02
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P 311737Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6681
INFO AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 08596

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, UK
SUBJ: THE SNP CONFERENCE, MAY 25-27

SUMMARY: THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY ADOPTED MAJOR POLICY STATEMENTS ON GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY, BUT THE GATHERING IN EDINBURGH DID LITTLE TO SHORE UP SAGGING SNP MORALE. DELEGATES AND PARTY LEADERS PRIVATELY EXPRESSED PESSIMISM ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF THE HAMILTON BY-ELECTION, AND THE PREVAILING MOOD OF THE CONFERENCE WAS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO LAST YEAR'S MEETING WHEN THE SNP WAS RIDING HIGH. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY WAS HELD IN EDINBURGH MAY 25-27. WHILE THE CONFERENCE DID ADOPT MAJOR POLICY STATEMENTS ON GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY, IT DID LITTLE TO SHORE UP SAGGING SNP MORALE IN THE WAKE OF RECENT DEFEATS IN THE GARSADDEN BY-ELECTION AND THE SCOTTISH LOCAL ELECTIONS. IN CONTRAST TO LAST YEAR'S CONFERENCE IN DUNDEE WHERE THE SNP HELD CENTER STAGE IN THE SCOTTISH MEDIA, THIS YEAR'S GATHERING IN EDINBURGH WAS A QUIET
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EVENT. FOR THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF THE CONFERENCE IT WAS ECLIPSED IN THE MEDIA BY THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SCOTTISH CHURCH WHICH WAS ALSO MEETING IN EDINBURGH, AND THROUGHOUT THE CONFERENCE DELEGATES WERE DISTRACTED BY THE BY-ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN HAMILTON AND MANY ABSENTED THEMSELVES FROM THE PROCEEDINGS TO JOIN PARTY CANVASSERS IN THE CONSTITUENCY.

2. THE CONFERENCE DEBATED 47 RESOLUTIONS ON SUBJECTS RANGING FROM MAJOR POLICY STATEMENTS TO MESSAGES OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO BE SENT SCOTTISH FOOTBALLERS IN ARGENTINA. OF THE MAJOR POLICY STATEMENTS TO BE ADOPTED, THE RESOLUTIONS ON ECONOMIC STRATEGY AND GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE WERE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT AND CONSTITUTED THE MAJOR WORK OF THE CONFERENCE. AN ELABORATE OUTLINE FOR THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT IN AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND WAS ACCEPTED BY THE DELEGATES, WHICH CALLED FOR A CABINET SYSTEM HEADED BY A PRIME MINISTER AND INCLUDING 14 MINISTRIES. THE 14 MINISTRIES WOULD TAKE OVER RESPONSIBILITIES CURRENTLY HELD IN WHITEHALL BY THE SCOTTISH OFFICE, THE HOME OFFICE, THE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY. THE PROPOSAL ALSO CALLED FOR A MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO EVENTUALLY TAKE OVER RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE FOREIGN OFFICE FOR CONDUCTING SCOTLAND'S RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

3. THE SNP'S OUTLINE FOR A POST-INDEPENDENCE ECONOMIC STRATEGY ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE WAS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE WEALTH OF SCOTLAND UNDER THE CONTROL OF AN INDEPENDENT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT WOULD BEST BENEFIT THE SCOTTISH PEOPLE THEMSELVES. IT CALLED FOR A SLOWER RATE OF DEPLETION OF NORTH SEA OIL RESERVES

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AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY TO CREATE NEW ENTERPRISES TO SUPPLEMENT EXISTING INDUSTRIES. MOST OBSERVERS CONSIDERED IT TO BE RATHER SYMPLISTIC AND GENERALIZED.

4. OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH DELEGATES AND PARTY LEADERS AT THE CONFERENCE CONFIRMED A SENSE OF SAGGING MORALE AFTER GARS CADDEN AND THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS. PARLIAMMENTARY PARTY LEADER DONALD STEWART TOLD US THAT GARS CADDEN CANDIDATE KEITH BOVEY WAS NOT THE BEST CHOICE FOR THAT CAMPAIGN AND ALSO CRITICIZED THE MASSIVE CANVASSING EFFORTS IN THE CONSTITUENCY WHICH HE SAID AMOUNTED TO "OVER KILL." STEWART WAS NOT OPTIMISITC ABOUT THE UPCOMING HAMILTON BY-ELECTION. THE GENERAL IMPRESSION WE HAD WAS THAT THE PARTY, DESPITE PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS TO THE CONTRARY, IS EXPECTING TO LOSE. STEWART INDICATED THAT IF THE SNP LOSES THE HAMILTON ELECTION, IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE PARTY IF THE GENERAL ELECTION WERE HELD OFF UNTIL THE SPRING, THOUGH HE RECOGNIZED THAT WITH STEEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE END OF THE LIB-LAB PACT, AN OCTOBER ELECTION WAS ALMOST A

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P 311737Z MAY 78
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INFO AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 08596

CERTAINTY.

COMMENT: WHILE WE WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO FIRMLY PREDICT A DECLINE IN THE FUTURE FORTUNES OF THE SNP, THE PREVAILING MOOD AT THE EDINBURGH CONFERENCE WAS PESSIMISTIC AND DEFENSIVE. FOLLOWING THE SNP DEFEAT IN GARSCADDEN AND REVERSES IN THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS, THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WAS SO EVIDENT A YEAR AGO WAS GONE. A WIN IN THE HAMILTON BY-ELECTION, WHICH THE PARTY BADLY NEEDS, SEEMS INCREASINGLY BEYOND ITS GRASP. THE RESOLUTIONS DEBATED IN THE CONFERENCE WHICH WERE FRAMED IN COMMITTEES MONTHS BEFORE GARSCADDEN, SEEMED SUDDENLY OUT OF DATE. ONE COULD TALK IN GRAND TERMS ABOUT A NEW CABINET SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT FOR AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND BUT SUCH DISCUSSION SEEMED A BIT IRRELAVENT WHEN WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A SOUND STRATEGY ON HOW THE PARTY WOULD FIGHT THE COMING GENERAL ELECTION IN THE FACE OF A LABOR REVIVAL NORTH OF THE BORDER. SHOULD THE PARTY'S UNEASE ABOUT HAMILTON BE CONFIRMED, IT WILL BE FORCED TO DO SOME FRESH THINKING, LITTLE OF WHICH WAS IN EVIDENCE AT THE
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CONFERENCE OVER THE WEEKEND.

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